

SESSION 3

The Testimony of Our Hope



QUESTION 1:

When have you bought something based on a friend's recommendation?

THE POINT

Our hope in Christ points others to Him.

THE PASSAGE

1 Peter 2:4-15

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

“If God loved me, He would not have treated me this way.”

Charlotte Elliott often said this because poor health had rendered her disabled.

When Dr. Cesar Malan, a Swiss minister, visited her family home in 1922, he spoke with Charlotte about her condition. The minister’s genuine concern for her, coupled with his own confident faith, led to a breakthrough. He told her the cure for her misery was the very faith she despised. He said, “Give yourself to God just as you are now, with your fightings and fears, hates and loves, pride and shame.”

Charlotte turned to God and experienced new life in Christ that very day. As she grew in her walk with the Lord, she studied His Word and began to write hymns, the most famous of which detailed that most pivotal day in her life:

*Just as I am without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*¹

Dr. Malan’s hope pointed Charlotte to a Living Hope, and our hope can point others to Christ too. A life lived in Christ is a great “recommendation” to others to come to Him.

1 Peter 2:4-6

4 As you come to him, a living stone—rejected by people but chosen and honored by God—

5 you yourselves, as living stones, a spiritual house, are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

6 For it stands in Scripture: See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and honored cornerstone, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame.

KEY WORDS: Priesthood (v. 5)—God appointed Aaron and his descendants to serve as mediators between Himself and the Israelites (Ex. 28:1; Num. 18:1-7). Through Jesus’ sacrifice, believers are priests who can approach God directly.

Put to shame (v. 6)—The Greek word (*kataischuno*) has the meaning of being put to shame, humiliated, or disappointed because of the inadequacy of one’s hope or faith.

Our salvation was secured once and for all in Christ, so Peter’s phrase “as you come to him” is not a reference to the initial salvation decision; rather, it is a picture of the children of God constantly drawing near and coming into His presence. Under the Old Testament sacrificial system, only priests had the privilege of coming into God’s presence to offer sacrifices, but under the New Covenant, all believers can enter into that sacred place. We “are being built to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God.”

Believers are also being built into a spiritual house. In the Old Testament, the temple and specifically the holy of holies was the dwelling place of God among His people, but now, we are that dwelling! “For we are God’s coworkers. You are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Cor. 3:9).

“So then you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints, and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole building, being put together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you are also being built together for God’s dwelling in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:19-22).

The Jewish people called out to God as their rock and salvation (Ps. 18:2; 62:2), and Jesus now was identified as the chief cornerstone of this spiritual house. Jesus is the foundation of the church who provides its stability, security, and strength. The cornerstone was crucial to a building’s overall structure. It was the main foundation stone in ancient buildings and tied everything together as the place where walls would meet, or it served as the keystone in the center of an arch. In both cases, the cornerstone was the stabilizing stone in the structure. The body of Christ is not held together by preferences, creeds, politics, tradition, culture, a constitution and bylaws, or denominational ties; but by the chief cornerstone that is Jesus Christ. There is stability because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His church holds an unchanging message in changing times.

“Believers are living stones in His building. Each time someone trusts Christ, another stone is quarried out of the pit of sin and cemented by grace into the building.”

WARREN WIERSBE

Because the foundation is rock solid, believers will never be disappointed or put to shame. We have no regret or remorse after making the decision to follow Christ. D. J. Kenyon wrote, “Peter is saying this for our encouragement that once our attitude toward this chief, elect, precious, Cornerstone is established

there will never be occasion to regret our choice or blush at any circumstance, because our faithful Lord does not leave us abandoned to our own resources. One who centers his life in Christ will never have reason to regret his choice.”²

QUESTION 2:

What are some foundations people build their lives upon?

1 Peter 2:7-10

7 So honor will come to you who believe; but for the unbelieving, The stone that the builders rejected—this one has become the cornerstone, **8** and A stone to stumble over, and a rock to trip over. They stumble because they disobey the word; they were destined for this.

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In ancient Jerusalem, Herod built the Tower of Antonia as the headquarters of the Roman government, where Pontius Pilate stayed when he visited Jerusalem from his home base in Caesarea by the Sea. Quarrymen cut stones from the bedrock of Mount Moriah to build the fortress as well as the temple, the temple platform, and the colonnade on the temple mount. Antonia’s Fortress stood on the northern end of the temple courtyard and spread across four large towers. Pilate brought Jesus from one of these towers when the people shouted for the release of the criminal Barabbas over the innocent Christ (Mark 15:6-15; John 19:13). Down below this tower along the Western Wall

is a sidewalk that probably ran through a market where daily commerce and trade commenced. Over the years, this area has been excavated, and tourists to Jerusalem today can walk along this same first-century ground. A massive hewn stone sits where the sidewalk ends. It is very likely that Jews during Jesus' day would have known about this rock as one rejected by the stone masons who worked diligently under Herod's oversight. The stone had been chiseled in places, but for some reason the builders rejected it and cast it aside.

I like to use my "sanctified imagination" to picture Jesus Himself standing somewhere in the vicinity of this rock when He quoted Psalm 118:22-23: "Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what the Lord has done and it is wonderful in our eyes?" (Matt. 21:42). Just days later in the Antonia Fortress right above this rock, He would be rejected by His own people and condemned to death.

Others may reject Christ, but believers stand confidently because of who we are in Christ. Peter gave some pretty incredible descriptions of the people of God who have found refuge in the Rock of salvation:

- ▶ **A Chosen Race.** God chose Israel not on the basis of their size or merit, but out of His great love (Deut. 7:7-9). He also has chosen us because of His great grace and love (John 15:16; Eph. 2:8-10).
- ▶ **A Royal Priesthood.** This unparalleled description is unique to believers. In the Old Testament, the tribe of Levi was the priestly line, and the tribe of Judah was the royal line; those lines never crossed. However, we who are in Christ are of a completely new line: we are people of the new covenant who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, who is both our faithful High Priest (Heb. 2:17) and King of Kings (Rev. 19:16). A. W. Tozer admonished, "...do not let the world or the books of psychology tell you what you are. ... You belong to a royal priesthood, and the priesthood now lies in the hands of the

individual Christians. It is not an order of part of the people; the church is priesthood, and every Christian is his own priest.”³

- ▶ **A Holy Nation.** As we saw in the previous session (pp. 28-37), we are called to holiness because God is holy. John Piper notes, “You share [God’s] character, because he chose you, pitied you, possessed you. You are holy. If you do not act in a holy way, you act out of character. You contradict your essence as a Christian.”⁴
- ▶ **A People for His Possession.** We have a personal relationship with Christ. We can know Him, and He knows us completely. We are His, and no one can take us from Him or sever the union we share as His own people (John 10:27-30; Rom. 8:31-39).

QUESTION 3:

How does it make you feel to know that God chose you to be a part of His family? Why?

1 Peter 2:11-15

11 Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul.

12 Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

13 Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority

14 or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good.

15 For it is God’s will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.

QUESTION 4:

How can believers maintain distinctiveness in this world?

Our walk must match our talk. These verses deal with the believer's behavior in a pagan world, where the environment may not be so friendly or comfortable for Christians. If we claim to be Christ-followers, then we must live His life before this world. "Because as he is, so also are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

Living with heaven in view will make our walk on earth more effective and consistent. We realize we are accountable before God and we are aware of our witness and our calling. When our hearts and minds are in tune with the things of God, it shows up in our everyday conduct. Christians should be the very best neighbors, citizens, bosses, employees, friends, and coworkers. We are to represent Christ in everything we do—from paying our bills to playing sports to raising our kids.

Peter noted three ways we can exemplify Christ.

1. **Abstain from sinful desires.** We bear responsibility for our actions; therefore, we should remove ourselves from certain influences and situations. It is critical for us to be on guard against things that war against us. God-given desires used in the wrong way can damage our witness. No magic formula exists to remove us from the war of the spirit against the flesh. The process of sanctification is ongoing, and though saints may struggle, we do not have to live in defeat. Our good works and godly living will serve to point others to the One who has saved us and set us on a new course.
2. **Submit to authority.** Peter did not back down on his instruction about submitting to human authority, even though many of the believers he wrote to were facing intense persecution at the hands of those in authority. A governmental system may be corrupt, but God has ordained the institution of government itself for the good of its citizens. Therefore, when we submit ourselves to delegated power, we submit to

God. When we are honest and upright in a hostile world, it is evidence of our obedience. God allows a watching world to gain insight into His ways because of how His people maintain honesty and integrity, even in high-pressure situations.

3. **Do good.** “For it is God’s will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good.” People often question what God’s will is for their life, and yet it’s spelled out here in black and white: do good. We don’t silence our critics by arguing, debating, or shouting—and certainly not by airing all our grievances on social media platforms. We shut them down by our good works.

God has linked His reputation in this world to our behavior. The unchurched may not read the Bible, but they do “read” you and me. We give a face to faith, a credible witness to a cynical world. Our lives of honor and integrity should not be a point of controversy or contention, and our reputations never should stand in the way of the gospel. We are aliens and strangers—Christians living in a non-Christian world—and we are responsible to live in such a way as to silence their accusations and cause them to stop and consider the goodness and glory of our God.

ENGAGE

What are some ways believers can do good so that God is glorified?

QUESTION 5:

Why is doing good an effective testimony to the world for hope in Christ?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you live out your hope to a watching world?

- ▶ **Be honorable.** Start your day by asking the Lord to make you mindful of ways you can honor Him as you go through your day, no matter how simple or insignificant you may think the task is. Small steps of obedience lead to a long path of godliness.
- ▶ **Be submissive.** Is there a person or agency of authority that you've not lovingly submitted yourself to as unto the Lord? Confess this to the Lord and seek to make it right with that person as soon as possible.
- ▶ **Be outspoken.** Someone in your circle of influence needs to know of your hope in Christ. Think of a tangible good that you can do for someone who may be ignorant or critical toward the gospel. Show the love of Christ to them with no strings attached!



END NOTES

1 Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World's Greatest Hymns Stories* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 112-113.

2 D. J. Kenyon, *He That Will Love Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1968), 102.

3 A. W. Tozer, *Living as a Christian: Teachings from First Peter* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 112.

4 John Piper, "Christian Identity and Christian Destiny," *Desiring God*, April 17, 1994, www.desiringgod.org/messages/christian-identity-and-christian-destiny.